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C.I.A. Revamps Its Handling Of Defectors Like Yurchenko

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WASHINGTON, April 10 — A senior C.I.A. official said today that the agency had made major changes in its procedures for handling defectors like Vitaly S. Yurchenko, the high-level Soviet official who fled to the West last year and then returned to Moscow.

The official, Robert M. Gates, disclosed the new approaches at his confirmation hearing for deputy director, the No. 2 post in the Central Intelligence Agency. At the hearing, senior members of the committee from both parties criticized the Reagan Administration's policy of providing covert aid to guerrilla movements around the world.

Mr. Gates, who is now the C.I.A.'s deputy director for intelligence, was unanimously approved by the committee, and his nomination is expected to go before the full Senate next week.

At the 90-minute hearing, held in the windowless room normally used by the committee for its secret sessions, Mr. Gates defended the use of covert action as a tool in foreign policy, saying:

"The experience of the last 10 years suggests that in many cases diplomacy alone is not an effective institution. That experience also would show that overt military action by the United States is either not appropriate or would not be supported by the American people or Congress. At that point, the United States has two options: de-

velop other instruments to carry out its policies, or turn and walk away."

On the subject of defectors, Mr. Gates said that in the future they would be given less freedom than Mr. Yurchenko, who bolted to the Soviet Embassy after dining with a single security guard at a restaurant.

There has been a continuing debate in the various intelligence agencies over whether Mr. Yurchenko was a genuine defector who had a change in heart or a planted agent designed to wreak havoc on the C.I.A. President Reagan speculated last year that Mr. Yurchenko's defection might have been a ploy.

Mr. Gates told the committee that there had been "organizational deficiencies" in the handling of Mr. Yurchenko. He said the agency had now put the care of defectors under the direction of a single office.

Each defector, he said, will be assigned to an individual case officer to insure "that there's somebody there he gets to know and can depend on and who understands him and can identify with him when he's going through particular psychological changes."

Mr. Gates also said the agency would change a policy that has been in effect for nearly 40 years of allowing defectors a maximum amount of freedom.